

What is claimed is:

1. A ball bat having a knob, a handle portion extending from the knob, a barrel portion extending from the handle portion, and an inflatable grip disposed on the handle portion, the inflatable grip comprising:

an inflatable tubular sleeve through which the handle portion extends;
an inflator in fluid communication with the inflatable tubular sleeve for pumping air into the inflatable tubular sleeve; and
a release valve in fluid communication with the inflatable tubular sleeve for releasing air from the inflatable tubular sleeve.

2. The ball bat according to claim 1 wherein the knob, handle portion and barrel portion are formed of metal.

3. The ball bat according to claim 1 wherein the inflator is adhered to the handle portion or the barrel portion.

4. The ball bat according to claim 3 further comprising an inflating ribbon in fluid communication between the inflator and the tubular sleeve.

5. The ball bat according to claim 1 further comprising a deflating ribbon in fluid communication between the release valve and the inflatable tubular sleeve.

6. The ball bat according to claim 5 wherein the release valve extends through the knob.

7. The ball bat according to claim 5 wherein the release valve extends through an end plug that snaps into the knob.

8. The ball bat according to claim 7 wherein the deflating ribbon passes through an opening between the handle portion and the knob.

9. The ball bat according to claim 1 wherein the inflatable tubular sleeve comprises a plurality of air cells that are in fluid communication with each other.

10. The ball bat according to claim 9 wherein the air cells are arranged in columns and rows.

11. The ball bat according to claim 1 further comprising an overwrap disposed over the inflatable tubular sleeve.

12. The ball bat according to claim 11 wherein the overwrap is spirally wound over the inflatable tubular sleeve.

13. The ball bat according to claim 11 wherein the overwrap covers the inflator.

14. A method of manufacturing a ball bat comprising:
providing a bat body comprising a handle portion and a barrel portion;
providing an inflatable grip, the inflatable grip comprising an inflatable tubular sleeve and an inflator and a release valve which are in fluid communication with the inflatable tubular sleeve;
sliding the handle portion of the bat body through the inflatable sleeve;
adhering the inflator to the handle portion or the barrel portion of the bat body;
attaching a knob to the handle portion of the bat body; and
securing the release valve to the knob.

15. The method according to claim 14 wherein the release valve is connected to the inflatable tubular sleeve by a deflating ribbon, and the method further comprises orienting the deflating ribbon in an opening defined by aligned notches formed in knob and the handle portion before the knob is attached to the handle portion of the bat body.

16. The method according to claim 15 wherein the knob comprises a collar and an end plug, and the method further comprises:

attaching the release valve to the end plug; and
joining the end plug to the collar.

17. The method according to claim 14 further comprising spirally winding an overwrap over the inflatable tubular sleeve.